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Barriers to Employment: Prison Time

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Barriers to Employment: Prison Time

by John Pawasarat, Employment and Training Institute, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2007

Introduction

This paper was prepared at the request of Legal Action of Wisconsin and the Private Industry Council of Milwaukee County to assess the legal and employment needs of prisoners released from Wisconsin correctional facilities. Released prisoners are a rapidly growing population in the City of Milwaukee, one which is seldom acknowledged except for media reports on the residences of sexual assault offenders. The sheer numbers and dramatic increases of the population make it one which merits attention. Previous Employment and Training Institute reports have examined the transportation, child care, and educational barriers to employment for low-income Milwaukee County residents. This analysis details barriers facing adults released from or currently in Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) facilities.

Released prisoners are one of the most difficult populations to serve and least likely to be successfully engaged in sustained employment due to persistent legal problems, low education attainment levels, high recidivism rates, and driver's license suspension and revocation problems. The stigma of being an ex-inmate alone and the limitations it places on those released and expected to become gainfully employed are compounded by further legal sanctions placed on those who have spent time in correctional facilities. Parents and non-parents released from DOC facilities face major barriers which impact their chances of reuniting with their families and securing regular employment.

- **Housing barriers** face those released from prison and applying for public housing subsidies. Some may not be eligible at all for subsidized housing, while others are subject to the practice of sharing criminal records with Section 8 landlords.
- **Education barriers** have been instituted for the population of felons with drug-related convictions which prevent them from obtaining Pell grants to attend vocational education classes, college, and other post-secondary education programs.
- **Income maintenance barriers** are most severe for those with drug convictions, making them ineligible for food stamps or TANF services.

This report focuses on the legal and transportation barriers to employment for 26,772 adults released from Wisconsin correctional facilities since 1993 and most likely to be currently living in Milwaukee County, along with the characteristics of 10,308 Milwaukee County residents still incarcerated in Wisconsin correctional facilities as of June 2006. The driver's license status and low educational levels of the populations stand in sharp contrast to the limited number of jobs available in the neighborhoods where these prisoners are released. Previous ETI research on the welfare-to-work population has shown the driver's license to be more important than educational status in accessing and retaining employment. The most recent May 2006 employer job survey (conducted by the UWM Employment and Training Institute for the Private Industry Council of Milwaukee County) found that three-fourths of the job openings in the metro area were located in areas not easily accessed by public transportation. In the CDBG

(Community Development Block Grant-targeted) central city Milwaukee neighborhoods where most prisoners are released, the survey showed a job gap of 7 to 1, that is, 7 jobseekers for every 1 full-time job available. Further, ex-offenders seeking work in these (and other) neighborhoods must compete with jobseekers who have a valid driver's license and who do not have a prison record.

I. Recommendations

1. **The DOC should assess the driver's license status of prisoners immediately upon their entry to the DOC facilities as part of an employability plan** to target those most likely to benefit from license restoration initiatives. Those prisoners should be identified who will be required to serve a waiting period after application for their driver's license so that the **application wait period can be served during incarceration in the DOC facility**.
2. The state Department of Corrections should redirect existing remediation and reentry resources to launch an **in-house driver's license restoration initiative** which would:
 - Prepare inmates to take the written driver's license test.
 - Allow inmates to apply for a driver's license if they do not have a current license.
 - Assign Department of Transportation staff to administer the driver's license written test prior to release.
 - Schedule appointments for the road test immediately upon release.
 - Create a way for inmates to work off reinstatement and application fees through prison work programs or points for good behavior.
3. **The state Department of Workforce Development should document the pre- and post-employment experience of adults released from and admitted to DOC facilities** using the state Department of Workforce Development wage match data to gauge the effectiveness of post-release employment initiatives and to identify populations most likely to benefit from pre-employment and driver's license initiatives.
4. **The City of Milwaukee should examine the negative cost impacts of City of Milwaukee imposed suspension-related fines on both the released and incarcerated populations.** The City of Milwaukee is responsible for most of the driver's license suspensions in Milwaukee County using suspension orders for failures to pay fines not related to serious driving violations.
5. **Leadership and coordination** between the Department of Corrections, the Department of Workforce Development, the Private Industry Council and community partners are necessary **to target sufficient direct services** to the DOC population in Milwaukee County
6. Given the concentration of ex-offenders in Milwaukee, **increased funding is needed for education and training support for Milwaukee residents** who are ex-offenders.

II. Methodology

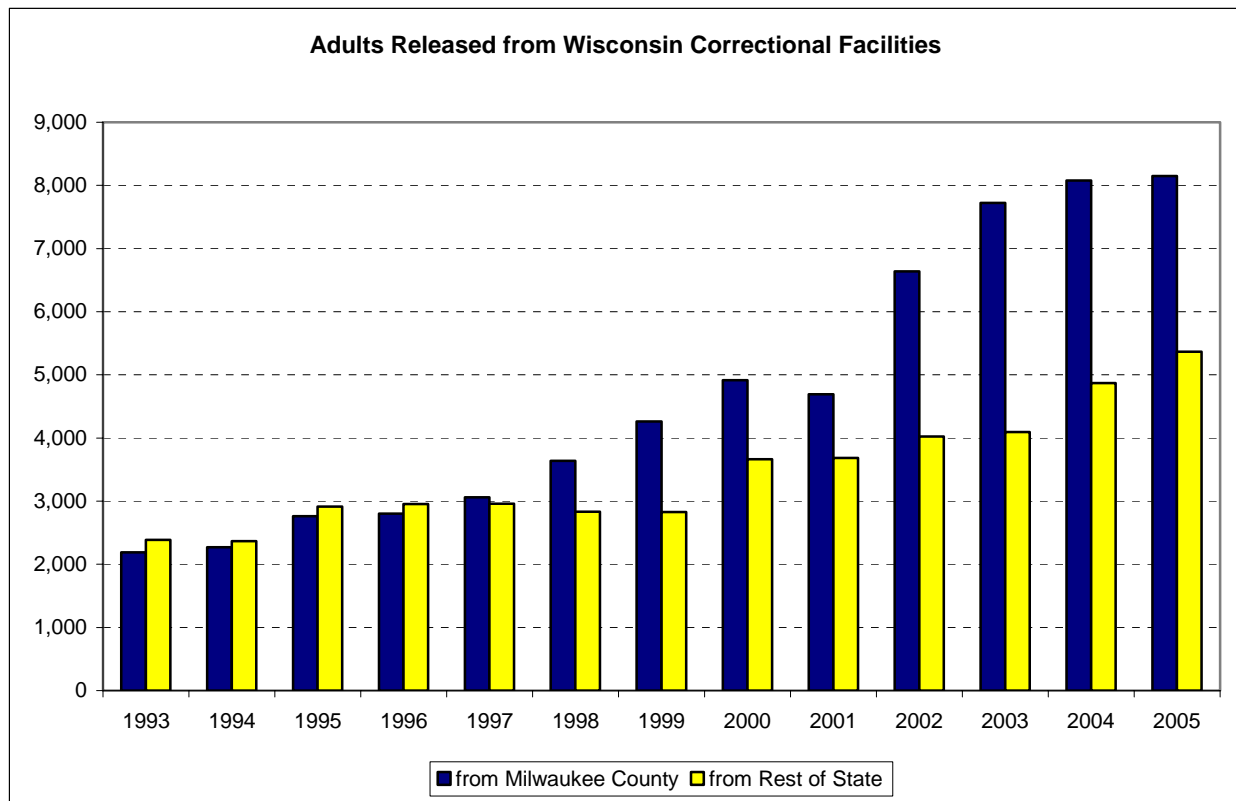
This analysis uses the Department of Corrections June 30, 2006 State of Wisconsin public inmate data file available biannually and containing detailed information on each incarceration and release of adult inmates since 1993. The DOC files analyzed include demographic characteristics as well the history of violations resulting in incarceration. The database includes individuals in the Wisconsin Department of Corrections system but does not include inmates in the House of Corrections and jails.

Additionally, state Department of Transportation files on revocations, suspensions, recent address, and driver's license status were matched with the DOC data to assess legal and transportation problems facing the population. The DOC data base documents adults who have been incarcerated or released since 1993 and consequently reflects a relatively young population likely to be incarcerated again. The data entries for admission and release from DOC facilities are for any reason, including for formal alternatives to revocation or for temporary probation and parole holds.

III. Findings on Release and Admission Rates for the Incarcerated Population from Milwaukee County

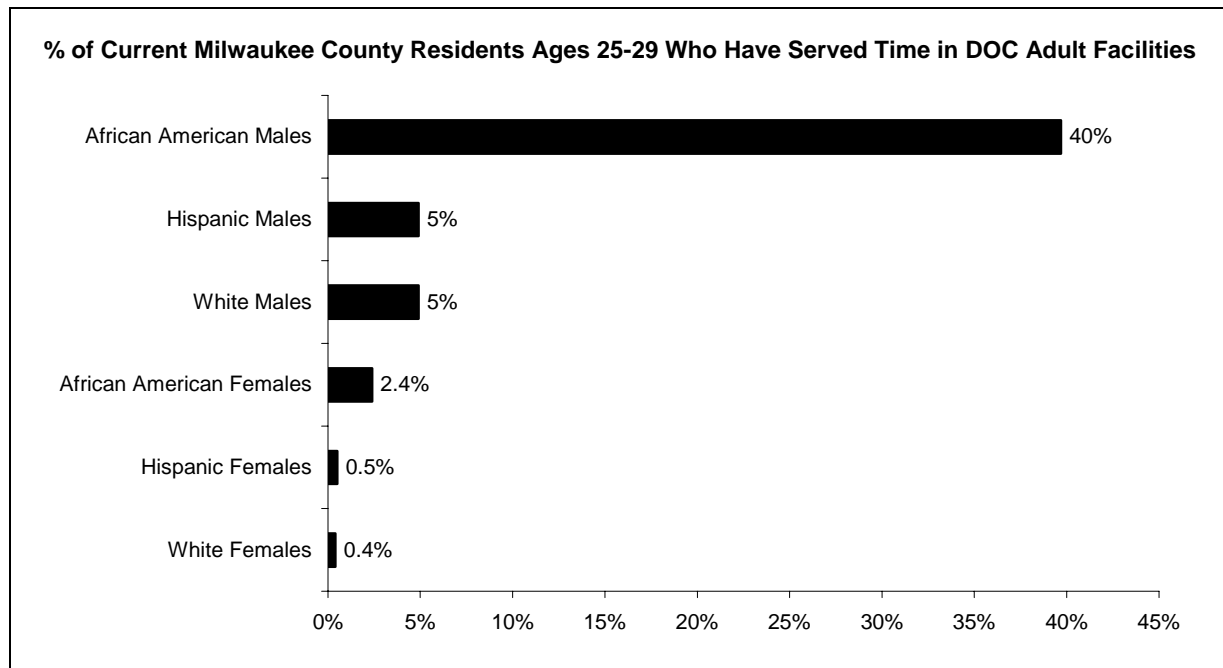
1. Milwaukee County has had close to a **four-fold increase in the incarcerated population released to Milwaukee County since 1993**. The number of persons released by the Department of Corrections institutions has grown 3.7 times from 2,191 in 1993 to 8,147 in 2005. In contrast, the population annually released to the rest of Wisconsin increased 2.2 times from 2,387 in 1993 to 5,369 in 2005. In the first half of 2006, 4,171 persons were released to Milwaukee County and 2,655 persons were released to the rest of the state.

Beginning in 1997, the number of persons released to Milwaukee County has exceeded those released in the balance of the state. The increase in those released to Milwaukee County in 2002 and after coincides with the opening of the Milwaukee secure detention facility.

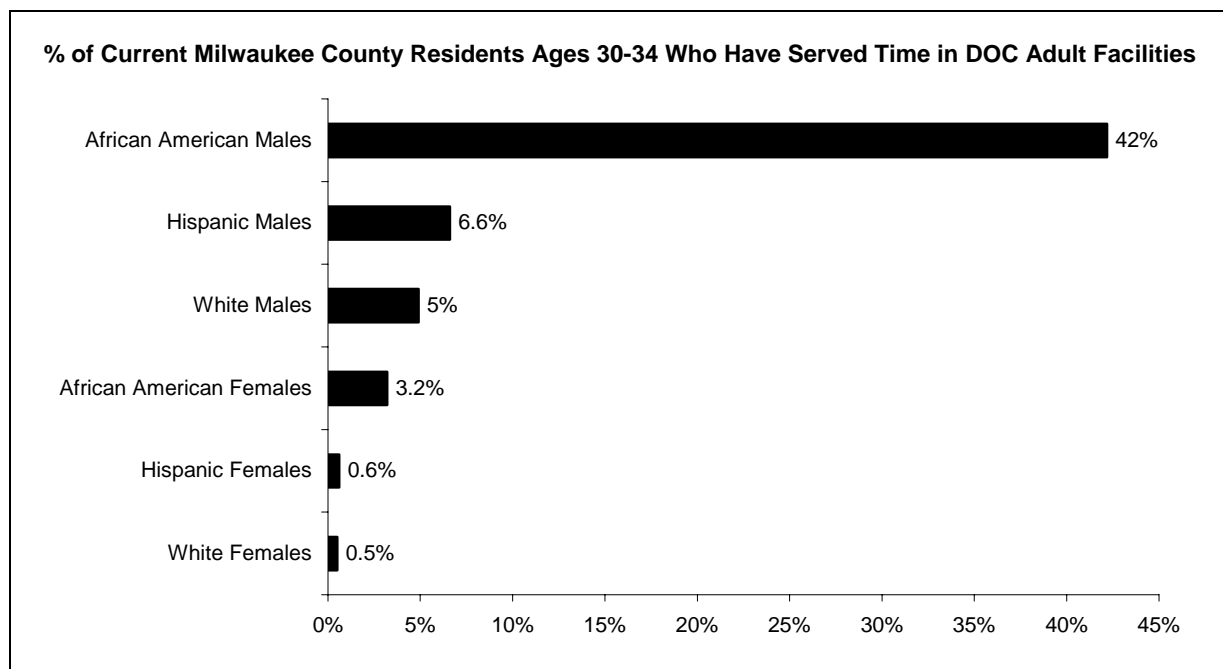


2. There are an estimated **26,772 persons currently residing in Milwaukee County who have done time** in a Department of Corrections facility since 1993, mostly men (89%) and majority African American (64%).
3. The rapidly increasing number of persons incarcerated in DOC facilities has led to a disproportionate impact on young African American males. An estimated **40% of African American males ages 25 through 29 who currently live in Milwaukee County have spent time in the Wisconsin corrections system**. In contrast, only 5%

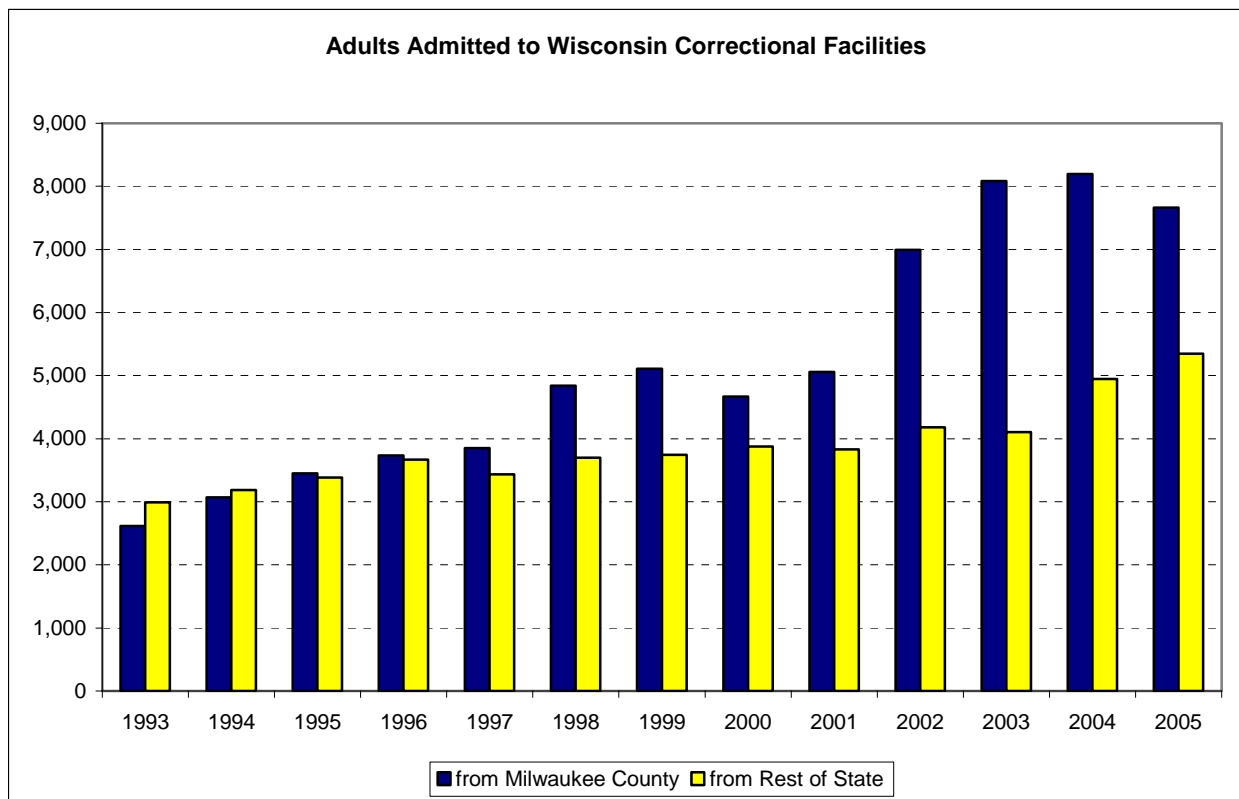
of white and 5% of Hispanic male county residents in the 25 through 29 year old age group have done time in DOC facilities.



An estimated **42% of African American males ages 30 through 34 who live in Milwaukee County have also spent time in Wisconsin adult correctional facilities.** In contrast, only 5% of white and 6.6% of male Hispanic county residents in the 30 through 34 year old age group have done time in DOC facilities.



4. The number of adults **admitted to Wisconsin DOC facilities** from Milwaukee County has grown 2.9 times the 1993 level of 2,614 to 7,663 in 2005. The number admitted from the rest of Wisconsin has increased 1.8 times from 2,991 in 1993 to 5,346 in 2005. Beginning in 1996 the number admitted from Milwaukee County exceeded the number from the rest of the state.
5. The **number of adults admitted to Wisconsin correctional facilities from Milwaukee County surged to 6,992 in 2002** and then rose to an **all-time high of 8,194 in 2004**. In the first half of 2006, 4,231 adults from Milwaukee County were admitted to DOC facilities, as were 2,708 adults from the rest of Wisconsin (and 746 adults from out-of-state or with missing residence codes). The increase of those admitted beginning in 2002 coincides with the opening of the Milwaukee secured detention facility.



The following table shows the numbers of persons released from DOC institutions each year from 1993 to present, as well as the number admitted to correctional facilities each year. Given high rates of recidivism, individuals may be counted multiple times as they enter, leave and reenter correctional facilities.

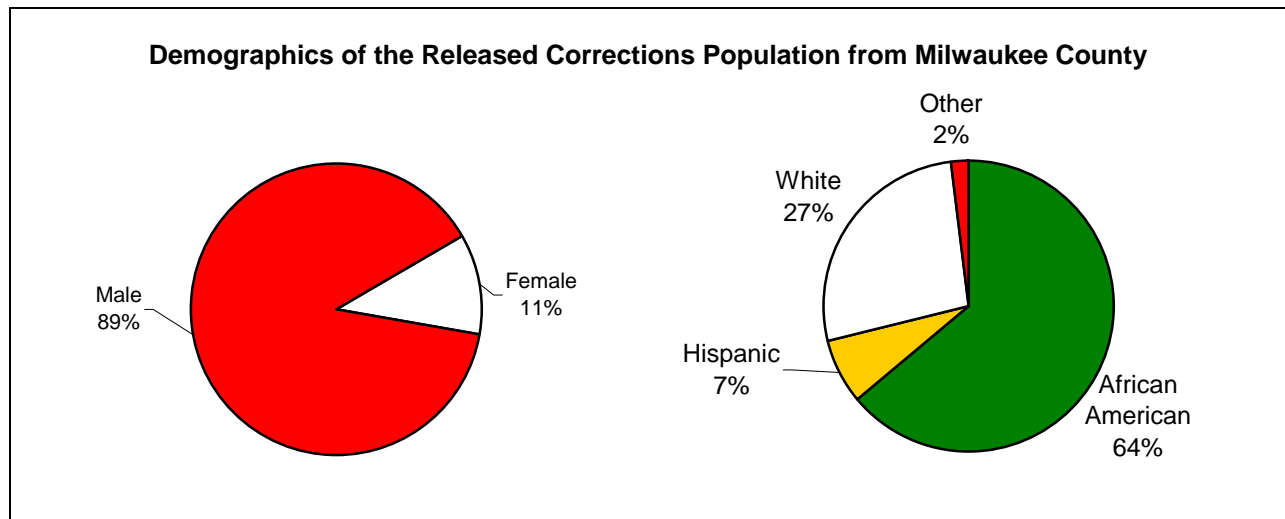
Persons Entering and Released from Wisconsin Correctional Facilities: 1993 – Present

<u>Year</u>	<u>Persons Released from DOC Facilities</u>			<u>Persons Admitted to DOC Facilities</u>		
	<u>Milwaukee County</u>	<u>Rest of State</u>	<u>Total*</u>	<u>Milwaukee County</u>	<u>Rest of State</u>	<u>Total*</u>
1993	2,191	2,387	4,764	2,614	2,991	5,806
1994	2,271	2,366	4,792	3,020	3,189	6,420
1995	2,761	2,914	5,811	3,452	3,384	7,044
1996	2,802	2,956	5,896	3,736	3,670	7,665
1997	3,060	2,958	6,156	3,850	3,437	7,552
1998	3,638	2,831	6,627	4,837	3,699	8,876
1999	4,261	2,826	7,235	5,108	3,745	9,247
2000	4,918	3,664	8,765	4,668	3,878	9,028
2001	4,692	3,683	8,705	5,056	3,830	9,448
2002	6,641	4,024	11,203	6,992	4,183	11,841
2003	7,724	4,096	12,568	8,082	4,103	13,066
2004	8,076	4,871	13,918	8,194	4,944	14,277
2005	8,147	5,369	14,651	7,663	5,346	14,413
2006 (1 st half)	4,171	2,655	7,379	4,231	2,708	7,685

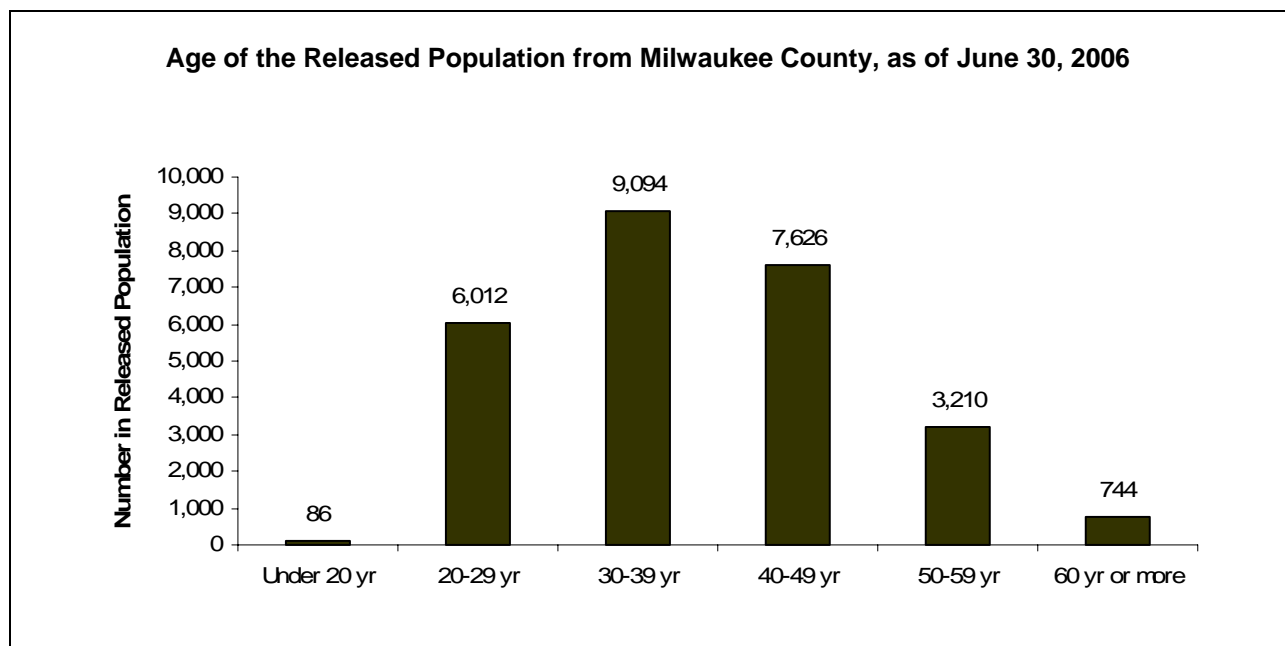
* Totals include persons from out-of-state and others with missing residence codes.

IV. Findings for the Population Released from Wisconsin Correctional Facilities Since 1993 and Living in Milwaukee County (N = 26,772)

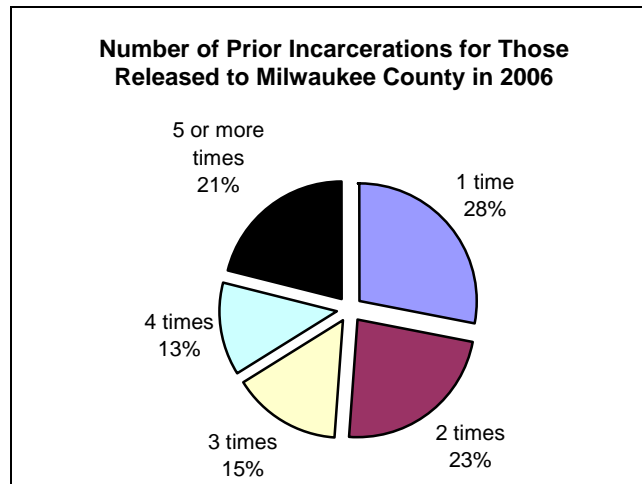
1. As of June 2006, some **26,772 Milwaukee County residents had been in a Wisconsin Department of Corrections institution** since 1993 and untold additional numbers prior to 1993. The population is mostly male (89%), and minority (including 64% African Americans and 7% Hispanics).



2. Over half (56%) of the **persons released from DOC facilities** since 1993 and living in Milwaukee County are **in their 20s and 30s**.



3. **Recidivism rates** are high, as are consequent legal needs. For those released in the first half of 2006, only 28% had been in state correctional facilities for the first time, while 23% had been in twice, 15% three times, 13% four times, and 21% five or more times. The data entries for admission and release from DOC facilities are for any reason, including for formal alternatives to revocation or for temporary probation and parole holds.



4. The increasing numbers of persons being admitted to and released from Department of Corrections institutions since the early 1990s has had a disproportionate impact on the African American population of young men. Currently, **40% of the 6,288 African American men ages 25 to 29 living in Milwaukee County consist of men previously incarcerated but now released** from Wisconsin DOC institutions, not including other populations incarcerated in the House of Corrections and city jails. This compares to a 5% DOC incarceration rate for white men and a 5% rate for Hispanic men in the county.

DOC Status of the Milwaukee County Population Ages 25 thru 29			
	<u>Whites</u>	<u>African Americans</u>	<u>Hispanics</u>
<u>Population Released from DOC Facilities and Currently Out</u>			
Males	847	2,494	298
Females	69	231	22
<u>Total Est. Population</u>			
Males	17,401	6,288	6,037
Females	16,482	9,644	4,662
<u>Released and Currently Out as % of Total Population</u>			
Males	5%	40%	5%
Females	0.4%	2.4%	0.5%

Released population is as of June 30, 2006. Population estimates are from the U.S. Census Bureau 2005 American Community Survey. The census estimates do not include persons living in institutions (e.g., county and city jails, dormitories, group homes).

5. Similarly, **42% of the population of the 6,415 African American men ages 30 through 34 living in Milwaukee County** is made up of men who **have previously been incarcerated** in Wisconsin DOC facilities. This compares to a 5% prior incarceration rate for white men and a 6.6% incarceration rate for Hispanic men in the same age range.

DOC Status of the Milwaukee County Population Ages 30 thru 34			
	<u>Whites</u>	<u>African Americans</u>	<u>Hispanics</u>
<u>Population Released from DOC Facilities and Currently Out</u>			
Males	932	2,708	333
Females	100	293	23
<u>Total Est. Population</u>			
Males	19,191	6,415	5,057
Females	18,486	9,128	3,984
<u>Released and Currently Out as % of Total Population</u>			
Males	5%	42%	6.6%
Females	0.5%	3.2%	0.6%

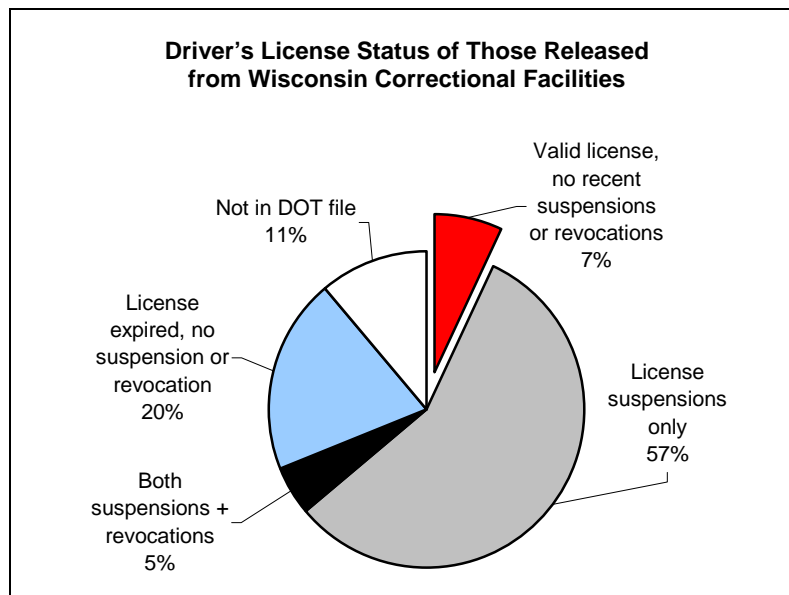
Released population is as of June 30, 2006. Population estimates are from the U.S. Census Bureau 2005 American Community Survey. The census estimates do not include persons living in institutions (e.g., county and city jails, dormitories, group homes).

6. The **younger population of previously incarcerated African Americans** is also the most likely to be **recidivists** and to **have suspensions and revocations** related to their driver's status. For those African American men ages 25 through 29, 86% of those with DOT records have suspension orders (and most of these did not have a license), and for those very few who had a driver's license, 90% had a suspension or revocation.

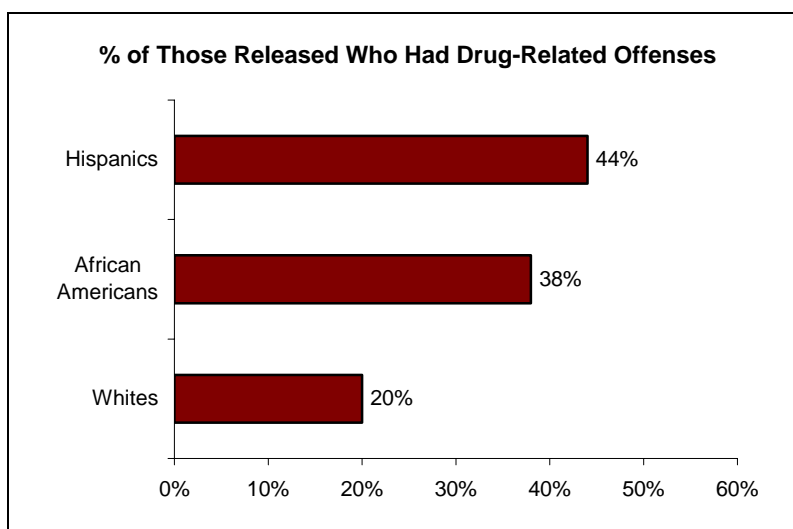
The same is true for the men ages 30 through 34 years in the population of African American men no longer incarcerated in the Wisconsin DOC facilities. For those with DOT records, 78% have suspensions orders (and most of these did not have a license). For those few who had a driver's license, 82% also had a suspension or revocation.

7. For the population of African American men currently released and in the **25 through 29 year** old age bracket (N=2,494), 43% were first timers, 25% second timers, and 32% were **previously incarcerated** in DOC facilities at least 3 or more times.
8. For the population of African Americans men currently released and **ages 30 through 34** (n=2,708), 44% were first timers, 25% 2nd timers, and 31% were **previously incarcerated** in DOC facilities at least 3 or more times.

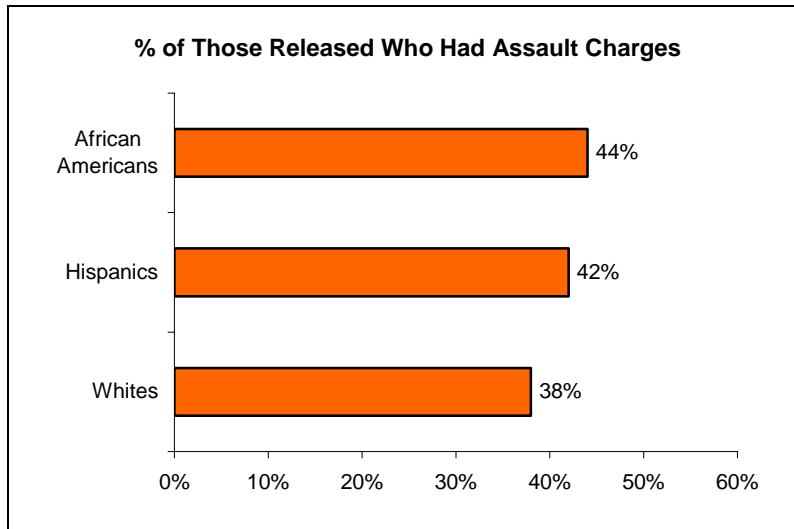
9. Legal problems related to **driver's license suspensions and revocations** are very high for the total released population as well. Of the 26,772 persons released to Milwaukee County since 1993, most (62%) face driver's license suspension problems, including 5% whose problems also involve revocations. Only 7% of the total released population showed recent evidence (as of 2003) of having a valid driver's license with no recent suspensions or revocations.



10. **Drug offenses** are common and result in additional legal barriers for those with driver's license suspension and revocation problems. Of those currently released, 44% of Hispanics, 38% of African Americans, and 20% of whites had been incarcerated at least in part for drug-related offenses.



11. **Assault charges** are also high across racial/ethnic categories with 44% of African Americans, 42% of Hispanics, and 38% of whites with assault charges.



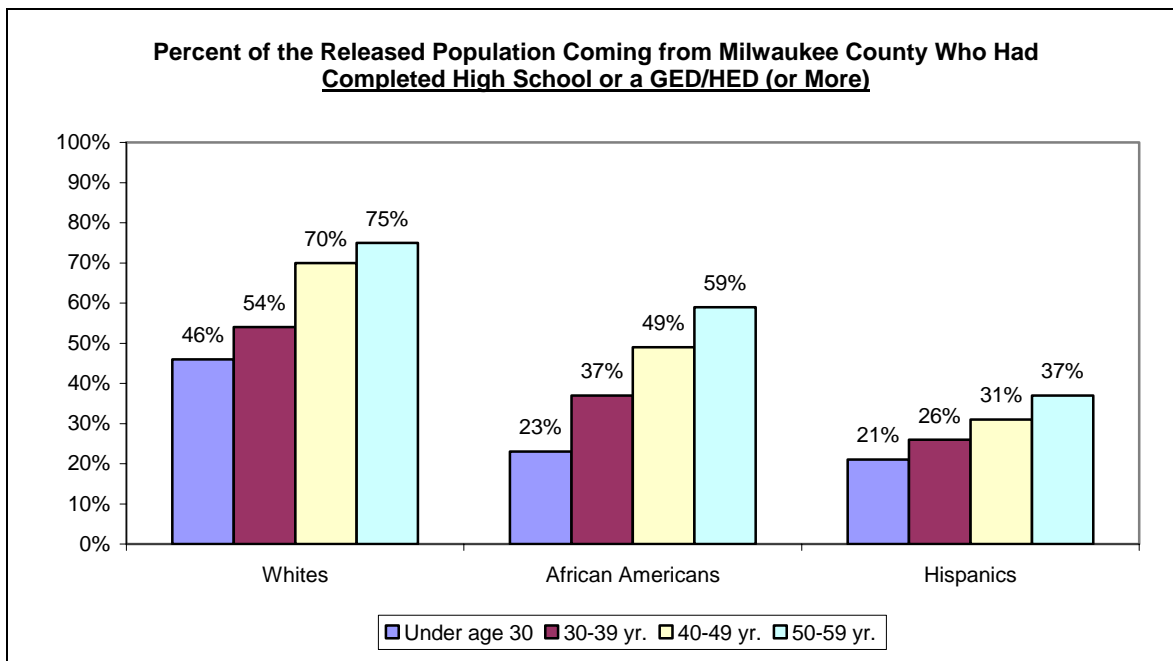
12. **Sexual assault** releases total 1,868, or 7% of the released population from state correctional facilities.
13. The population is **least likely to have completed high school**. For Hispanics, 72% have failed to graduate from high school, as have 60% of African Americans and 37% of whites. Education levels are very low, particularly for younger minority populations currently released. Most ex-offenders have less than a high school diploma, particularly for the younger population under 30 years of age, where only 9% of African Americans, 7% of Hispanics, and 20% of whites hold a four-year high school diploma or some college. The older populations show higher percentages of high school graduates.

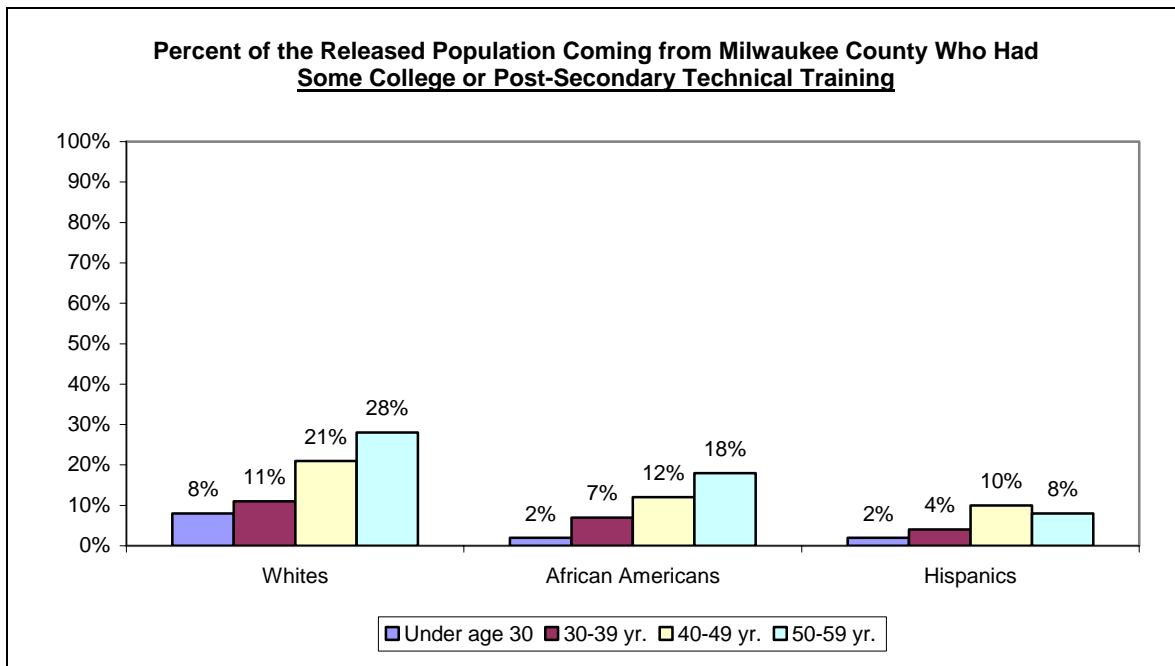
GEDs and HEDs (high school equivalency) credentials are more common than high school graduation for all age populations. For African Americans currently released, the 14% of those under age 30 with a GED/HED double the 7% with a four-year high school diploma, for those with no college coursework. The rate of the released population with GED/HED rather than four-year high school diplomas is almost triple for young Hispanics (where 14% have GED/HED and only 5% have four-year high school diplomas) and is double for young whites (where 27% have a GED/HED, compared to 12% with a high school diploma), for those with no college coursework.

The population with diplomas, GEDs or HEDs increases with the age of the population and the number of times the individual was incarcerated. The younger population (under age 30) is least likely to have some college or technical school education.

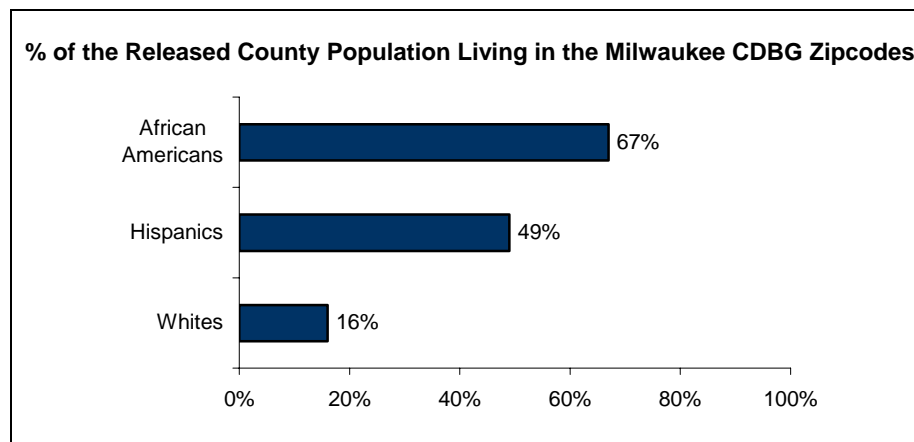
Level of Education of the Released Population from Milwaukee County

Highest Level of Education Completed	Current Age:			
	Under 30	30-39 yr.	40-49 yr.	50-59 yr.
African Americans (non-Hispanic)				
Less than high school completion	77%	63%	51%	41%
GED/HED	14%	17%	23%	25%
High school diploma	7%	13%	14%	15%
Some college or technical school	2%	6%	10%	15%
3 years or more of college	0%	1%	2%	3%
Hispanics				
Less than high school completion	79%	74%	69%	63%
GED/HED	14%	14%	12%	15%
High school diploma	5%	8%	8%	13%
Some college or technical school	2%	4%	9%	8%
3 years or more of college	0%	0%	1%	0%
Whites (non-Hispanic)				
Less than high school completion	54%	46%	30%	25%
GED/HED	27%	26%	31%	24%
High school diploma	12%	17%	19%	23%
Some college or technical school	7%	9%	17%	18%
3 years or more of college	1%	2%	4%	10%





14. Based on the most recent address available, 67% of African Americans released from correctional institutions **live in the poorest Milwaukee neighborhoods** (where job availability is lowest), as do 49% of Hispanics released from DOC institutions. By contrast, only 16% of non-Hispanic whites released live in the City of Milwaukee's poorest neighborhoods (i.e., those zipcodes targeted in the City's Community Development Block Grant, CDBG, program).

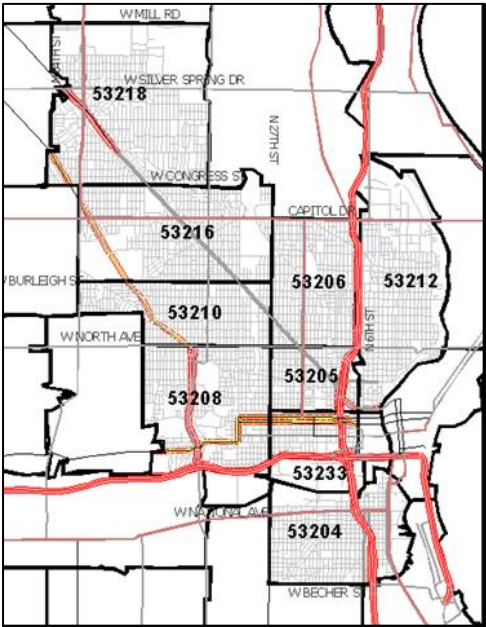


*Zipcodes include 53204, 53205, 53206, 53208, 53210, 53212, 53216, 53218, and 53233.

The combinations of race, transportation barriers, and educational levels further limit the labor market for the large number of those released to the poorest neighborhoods. The Employment and Training Institute May 2006 job openings survey for the Private Industry Council found spatial mismatches between

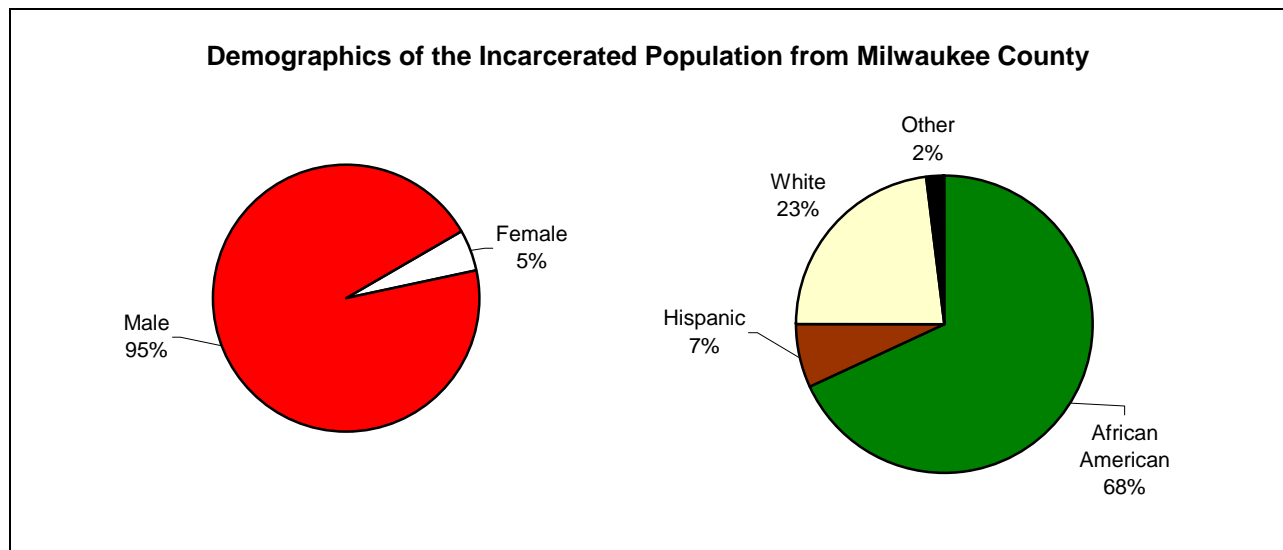
available job openings and the job-seeking workforce most acute in the CDBG Milwaukee neighborhoods, where job seekers outnumbered full-time openings by a gap of 7 workers for every 1 job available.

City of Milwaukee CDBG Zipcodes

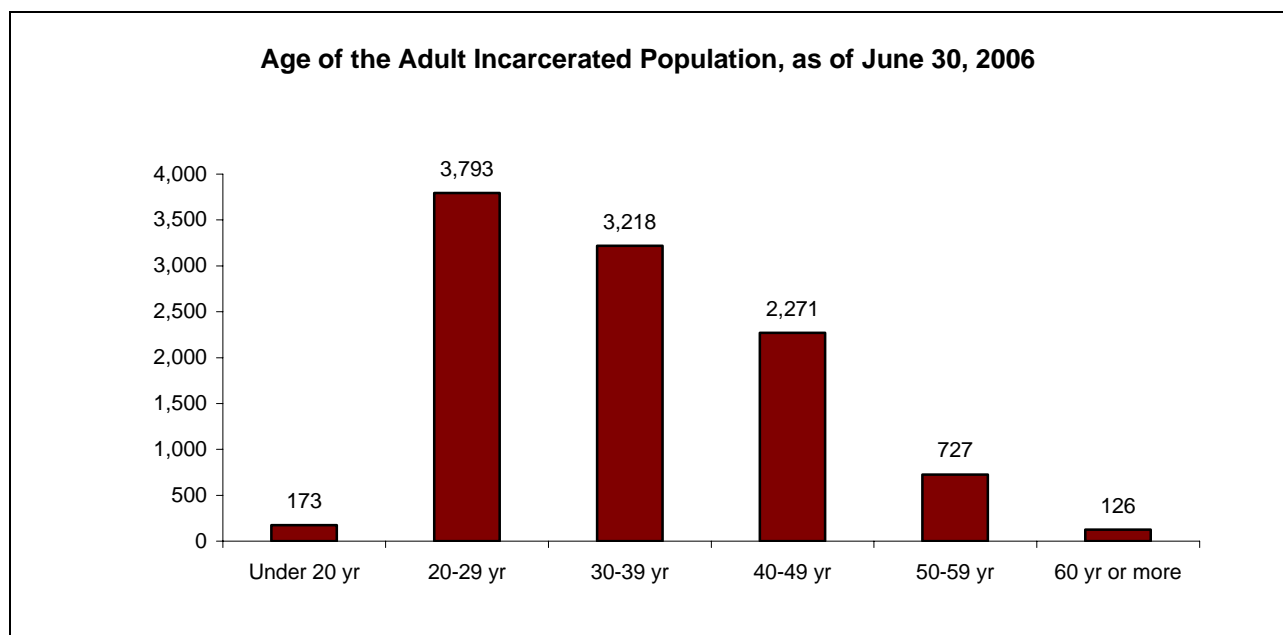


V. **Characteristics of the Currently Incarcerated Population from Milwaukee County (N= 10,308)**

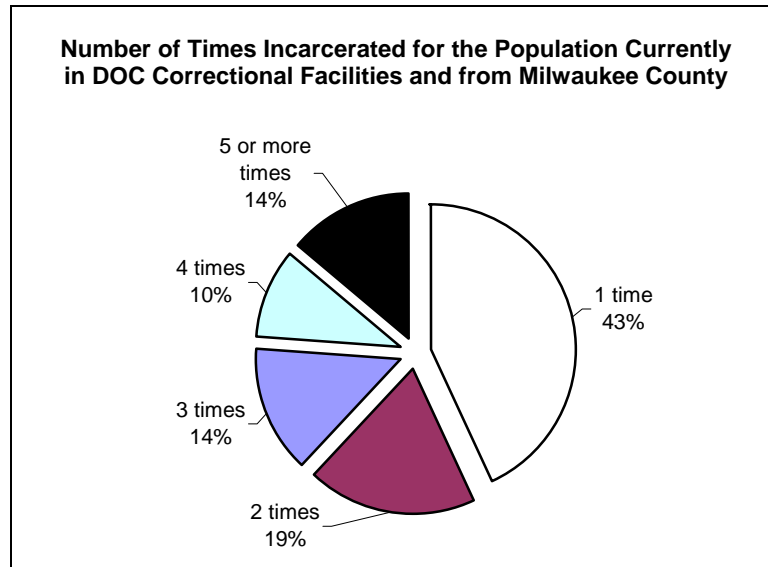
1. Most of the population originating from Milwaukee County and currently incarcerated in the State of Wisconsin Department of Corrections system (N=10,308) are **males** (95%) and **minorities** (68% are African American and 7% are Hispanic).



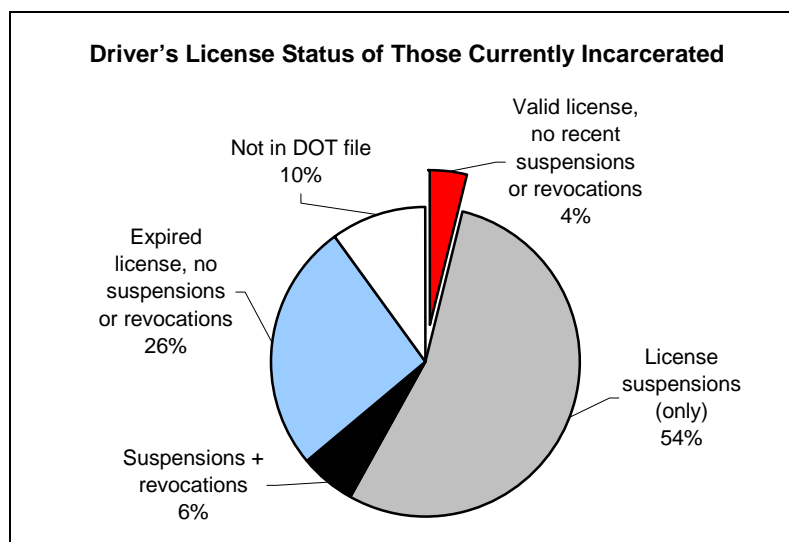
2. The incarcerated population is **mostly young**, with 37% in their twenties, 31% in their thirties, and 22% in their forties.



3. If **recidivism rates** remain similar to those of previously released populations, many of these adults will be released only to return to a correctional facility again. Of the persons presently incarcerated, 43% are in a Wisconsin DOC correctional facility for the first time, 19% for the 2nd time, 14% for the 3rd time, 10% for the 4th time, and 14% have been in correctional facilities 5 or more times.



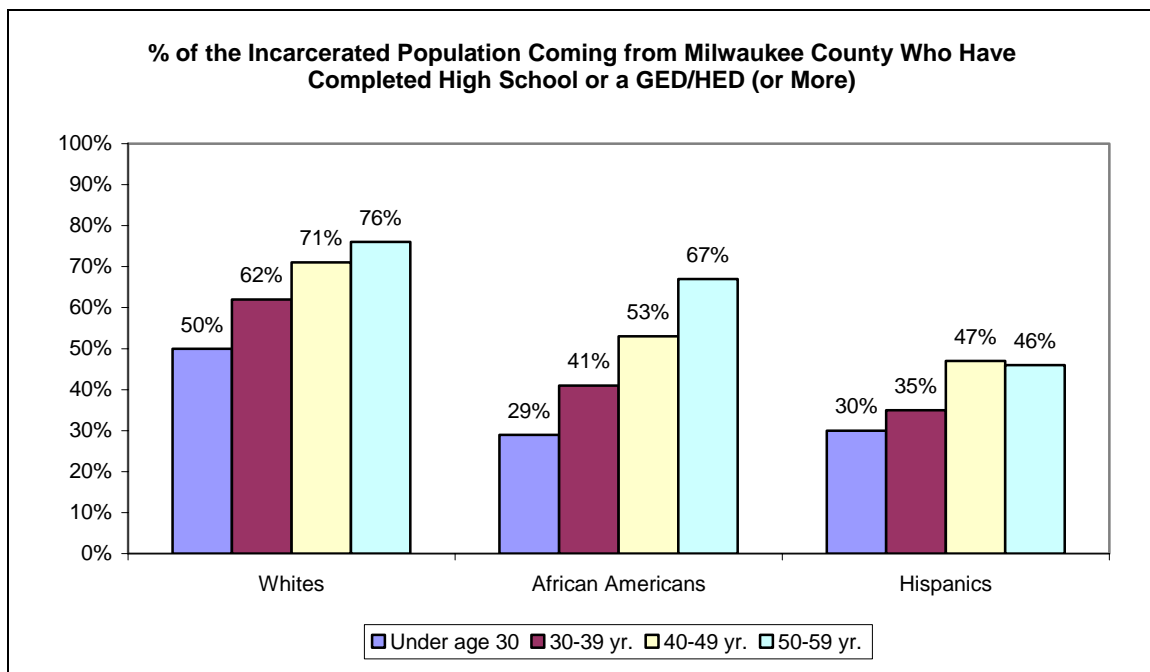
4. Of those 10,308 currently in correctional facilities, 66% were involved in assaults, 30% for drug convictions, and 15% for sexual assaults.
5. Most of the incarcerated population have legal problems related to their **driver's license records**. Some 61% have suspensions, including 6% with suspensions and revocations. Only 4% showed evidence of having a valid driver's license in good standing (as of 2003).

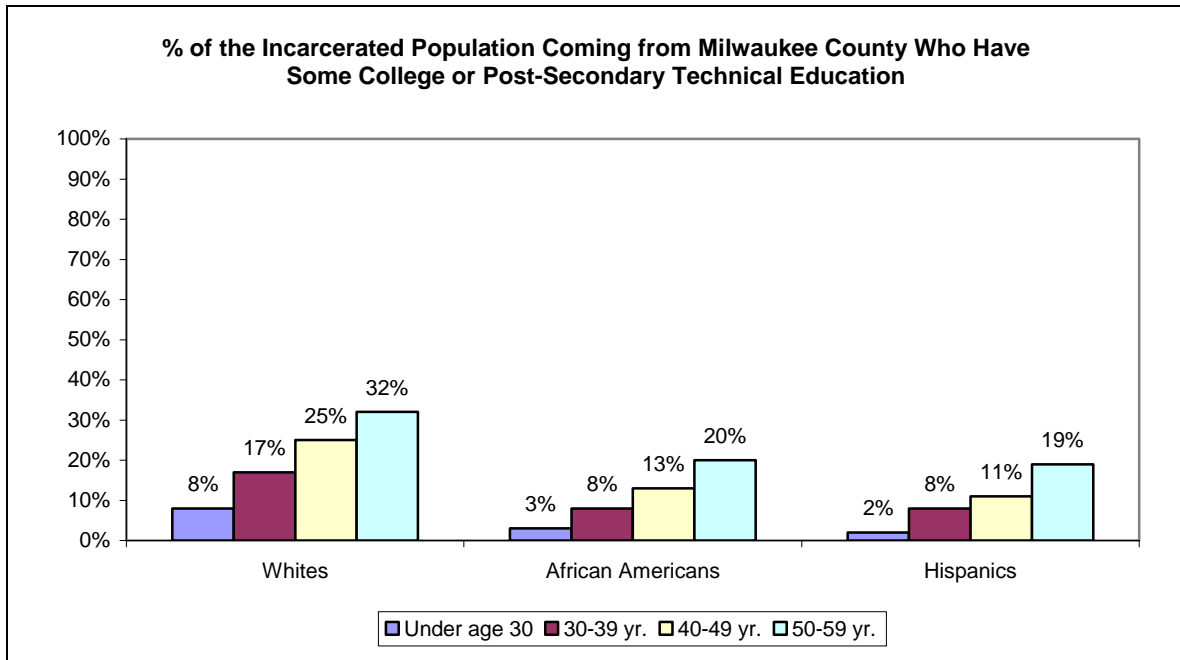


6. **Low levels of education** for the incarcerated population are similar to the released population with 36% of whites, 60% of African Americans, and 65% of Hispanics with less than a four-year high school diploma.

Level of Education of the Currently Incarcerated Population from Milwaukee County

<u>Highest Level of Education Completed</u>	<u>Current Age:</u>			
	<u>Under 30</u>	<u>30-39 yr.</u>	<u>40-49 yr.</u>	<u>50-59 yr.</u>
African Americans (non-Hispanic)				
Less than high school completion	71%	59%	47%	33%
GED/HED	20%	23%	28%	29%
High school diploma	6%	10%	12%	17%
Some college or technical school	3%	7%	11%	17%
3 years or more of college	0%	1%	2%	3%
Hispanics				
Less than high school completion	70%	65%	53%	54%
GED/HED	22%	21%	25%	16%
High school diploma	6%	7%	10%	11%
Some college or technical school	2%	8%	10%	8%
3 years or more of college	0%	0%	1%	11%
Whites (non-Hispanics)				
Less than high school completion	50%	38%	29%	24%
GED/HED	27%	30%	32%	20%
High school diploma	16%	16%	15%	24%
Some college or technical school	7%	14%	20%	23%
3 years or more of college	1%	3%	5%	9%





7. Most minorities currently in Wisconsin correctional facilities (and from Milwaukee County) come from the City of **Milwaukee's poorest zipcodes**. The Hispanic incarcerated population comes mostly from 53204 (39% of Hispanics) and 53215 (22%). The African American population is concentrated from 5 north side zipcodes: 53206 (17% of African Americans), 53210 (11%), 53212 (11%), 53208 (10%), and 53209 (10%).